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Office of University Communications

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Office of University Communications

October 23, 2012

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Preparing students to think critically, succeed professionally, and to serve faithfully are elements of the mission and vision of Gardner-Webb University. University leaders say their desire for Gardner-Webb students is that they, like Christ, “grow in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52)

Nonetheless, a goal is nothing without a plan to achieve it. Dr. Tracy Jessup is the Vice President for Christian Life & Service and serves as Senior Minister to the University. “It’s the mission of our office to nurture the spiritual development of students, faculty and staff on campus,” Jessup shared. “We do that by offering worship services, life-changing ministry and mission opportunities, and through small group activities both on campus and in the community at large.”

The office encompasses a wide range of spiritually-focused activities and programs, including student ministries, pastoral care, the Dimensions program, missions opportunities, and the new Center for Christian Ethics and Leadership. With a recent move over to the Tucker Student Center, the Office of Christian Life and Service is now more accessible to students than ever before.

“We were in a renovated residence hall, and it was very nice, but to be honest, you had to be going there on purpose to find us,” Jessup reflected. “Here, we’re out in the open. We’re on the main level and we’re very visible to students so they know we’re here.”

Locating various services, programs, and events is certainly easier than ever before with the completion of the Tucker Student Center. What is not always as simple for undergrads is approaching those activities with open hearts and minds. Each week, students attend the mandatory Dimensions program, which is coordinated by Jessup’s office. “The goal of Dimensions is to help students see how Christ can make a difference in lives, regardless of your calling and regardless of your vocation,” he reflected. “While students are required to attend, they are not forced to adopt anything that is shared. They have complete freedom to reject it or to embrace it.”

Just as free will is a central theme in the message of the Gospel, Jessup believes it is also honored at GWU. “Gardner-Webb provides a safe place for students to evaluate their spiritual beliefs, even to struggle with doubt in an environment that is going to nurture them and help them explore and to ultimately determine what it is that they believe,” he shared.

Creating a cookie-cutter version of the “ideal Christian” is not the goal of any of the programs or events of the Christian Life and Service office. “If they embrace it, I think Dimensions is a great place for those who have no relationship with God whatsoever to hear from varying perspectives what that means,” Jessup said. “And then, the more they hear what it means to have a relationship with Christ, they can be funneled into a small group, or come to The Verge [student-led worship service], or go on a mission trip. Regardless of where a student lives, they can get plugged in.”

As these young adults grow in their faith, the Christian Life and Service office gives them new opportunities to serve others through volunteer leadership. “One of the things that makes student ministries unique and vibrant is because upperclassmen leaders oversee each one of those ministries,” Jessup shared. “There are ministers all over—and I don’t mean ordained ministers. There are people of all ages throughout this campus who reach out to their coworkers or to students in a time of need that I have no ability to do.”

Through the years, the Office of Christian Life and Service has grown in order to accommodate the needs of a flourishing university. Many programs are still going strong, and new ones have also been added into the mix. Above all, Jessup’s heart remains true to the calling he answered long ago as a shepherd to a specific flock. “I wasn’t called here to direct a program,” he reflected. “I was called here to be a pastor to this community. Our heartfelt desire for students is that they ‘grow in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and with man.’ That really encapsulates the purpose of what we are trying to accomplish in the lives of these young people spiritually.”

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